District Review Report

School District No. 47 (Powell River)

April 19 - 21, 2004

Submitted to the Minister of Education

By District Review Team Chair
Mike Downey, Superintendent, School District No. 59 (Peace River South)

District Review Report

2003/2004

District Name:	Powell River
District Number:	47
Superintendent:	Brian Bennett
Date of Visit:	April 19-21, 2004
Team Chair:	Mike Downey, Superintendent, SD 59 (Peace River South)
Team Members:	Bruce Jansen, Principal, SD 8 (Kootenay Lakes) Gerald Morton, Ministry of Education Marguerite Stone, Ministry of Education Mike Suddaby, Superintendent, SD 42 (Maple Ridge) Elaine Viel, Parent, SD 22 (Vernon) Judith Zacharias, Teacher, SD 52 (Prince Rupert)

Context

School District No. 47 (Powell River) enrolls approximately 2,800 students in Powell River and surrounding rural areas including the Sliammon Reserve and Texada Island. Within the District are five elementary schools, one elementary-secondary school, one middle school and one secondary school. The District also provides educational services under contract to the Sliammon First Nations.

Governance of School District No. 47 (Powell River) occurs through a Board of seven school trustees.

The economic base of the community is changing from one based on resource industries to one that is more diverse and service oriented. The community has lost many of its high paying unskilled job opportunities. The enrolment of the District is continuing to decline at a rate of approximately 3.8% per year. Related to this, the Board has closed two schools in the last few years, and is in the process of amalgamating two secondary schools. The Board has also reviewed and modified school grade configurations. In general, district schools – particularly Brooks Secondary and Oceanview Middle – are in a process of transition. While this requires the concerted efforts and energies of personnel at all levels, school and district staff members are approaching these changes positively and constructively.

The Board expresses a commitment in its District Improvement Plan to a collaborative approach to school and district improvement planning. The Board's approach aims at providing a coherent overall district plan, while recognizing the uniqueness of each school.

Summary of Process

The major purpose of the District Review is to provide feedback and recommendations to the District, the Ministry of Education and the public regarding the District's work in improving student achievement. The specific purposes of the review are to:

- Review school district and school achievement data;
- Review the school district accountability contract and school plans to improve student achievement;
- Determine the capacity of the school district to support schools in improving student achievement;
- Make recommendations to the school district and to the minister about improving student achievement; and
- Identify promising practices that might assist other school districts and schools in their plans to improve student achievement.

In addressing these objectives, the Team reviewed the District's Accountability Contract (District Improvement Plan), Ministry data related to the District, and individual School Improvement Plans.

At the outset of the review, the Team met with senior district staff, the Board Chair and a number of educational leaders. The Team was provided with a comprehensive overview of the District Improvement Plan and with summaries of numerous district programs and initiatives.

Following the initial meeting, representatives of the Team met with a school focus group in each of the following eight schools:

> Edgehill, Grief Point, Henderson and James Thompson Elementary schools; Texada Island Elementary/Secondary school; Oceanview Middle school; Brooks Secondary school; and Kelly Creek Community school.

Each focus group consisted of parent and School Planning Council representatives, staff representatives and the school's administration. Discussion with each group focused on the 10 Points of Inquiry forming the structure of the District Review.

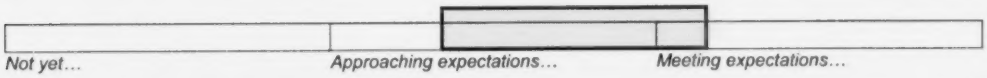
The Team was impressed, in the discussions at each school, with the thoughtful participation of parent, student and staff representatives. The Team noted the high level of dedication and energy among the teaching staffs.

At the conclusion of the review visit, the Team met with District's staff, Board and other representatives to present a draft of the Review Report.

The Team is appreciative of the support it received from the District in addressing the objectives of the Review, and was impressed with the District's clear and strong commitment to student learning. Further, the Team appreciated the hospitality, professionalism and warm welcome at each of its school visits.

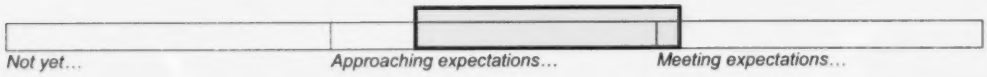
Observations in Key Areas - Focus on Student Achievement

1. *Goals:*
Improving districts and schools have a strong instructional focus. This focus is made visible in relevant goals for improving achievement for all students.



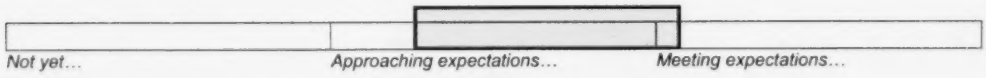
- The District and most schools have goals focused on student achievement.
- The Team found a strong commitment to the goals in the schools.
- The numeracy goal seems to be too narrowly focused.
- Some goals do not clearly address the differences in achievement of boys and girls and Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students.
- In some school plans, particular statements presented as goals were in fact strategies or mission statements.

2. *Rationale:*
Improving districts and schools have a thorough and connected set of reasons, **based on evidence**, for the selection of their student achievement goals.



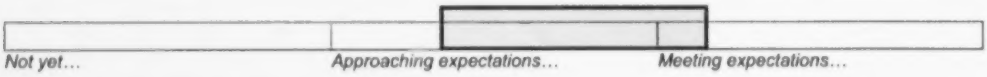
- The rationale for district goals is clear. However, in some school plans there was not a clear link between some goals and evidence to support the goal.

3. *Data:*
Improving districts and schools are actively considering at least three sources of evidence including classroom, school, district and provincial data. The analysis of this evidence informs the selection of the district goals and is used to monitor progress.



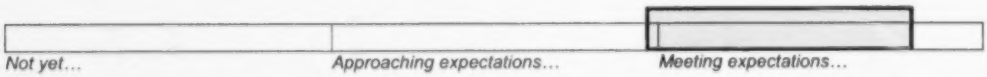
- Data driven decision-making is part of the district culture.
- Performance Standards are in varying degrees of use in the District. Work is underway to further expand the use of the standards as a source of data.
- The District has committed to the development of a system to track Aboriginal students at risk of not graduating. The Team concurs with the need for this system.

4. *Strategies:*
Improving districts and schools have well-organized, focused improvement plans in place. The strategies selected to achieve the goals are an intelligent blend of research, best practice, and innovative thinking.



- The strategies to support the district literacy goals are well thought out and grounded in best practice.
- The Team notes that strategies to address the specific needs of Aboriginal students are limited.

5. *Structures:*
Improving districts and schools have aligned structures – resources, time, organizations – to get the results they want. This includes, but is not limited to, effectively differentiating resources in the areas of highest need for improvement.

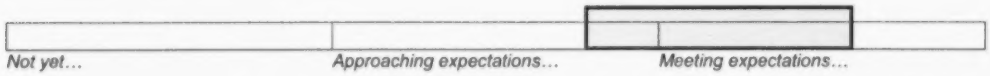


- The District has provided significant funding and made structural changes to support student achievement.
- A number of schools have adjusted structures, including time and resource allocation, to support goal attainment.
- The Team notes that the cumulative effect of ongoing reconfigurations within the district needs to be addressed so that all energies can be focused on student achievement.

6. *Results:*
Improving districts and schools get improved results – at the classroom, school and district levels.

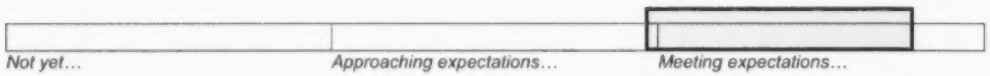
- Evidence shows that most schools are beginning to review results and make needed adjustments.
- The data shows that some strategies are beginning to show success.

7. *Communication:*
Improving districts and schools are involved in continuous dialogue about student achievement and make public their improvement goals and the progress being made in specific areas of focus.



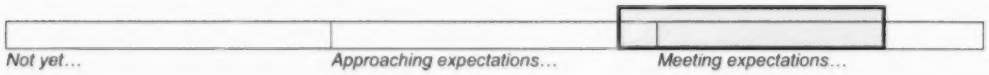
- School Planning Councils are actively involved in examining and discussing student achievement needs.
- Good practice requires regular monitoring of the effectiveness of communication initiatives.

8. *Teamwork – District and School Coherence*:
Improving districts and schools have an interactive strategy for connecting school and district goals. School uniqueness and school-district directions are both valued.



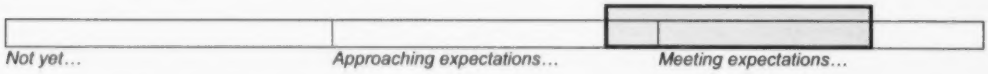
- The District has articulated a well-defined planning process and cycle for connecting school and district plans. This process is clearly understood and strongly supported.
- The District has identified School Completion Rates as one of its goals. The Team noted that this goal was not reflected in any school improvement plan.
- The District is nearing the completion of an Enhancement Agreement.

9. *Teamwork – District and Parent Involvement*:
Improving districts and schools work as a team with parents, including specific groups of parents, to improve student achievement.



- School Planning Councils are assuming active roles in planning and monitoring school goals.
- Orientation and training sessions provided by the District have been well received by School Planning Councils.
- There are many examples of positive and supportive relationships between schools and their parent communities.
- School Planning Councils and school staffs could benefit from, and would welcome further district training and support related to the selection and effective use of data.

10. *Leadership / Teamwork:*
Leaders in improving districts and schools have a clear vision for, and commitment to, improving achievement for all students. Leadership at all levels, in all roles, is encouraged and systematically developed in a collaborative learning community with a focus on improving student achievement.



- Leadership from all levels within the District is a key factor promoting the development of a culture focused on student learning.

Strengths

The Review Team noted the following strengths:

- Strong and clear commitment at district and school levels to improve student learning;
- Dedicated school staffs;
- Positive working relations between the District and the First Nations community;
- Board support and funding for structures that directly support the improvement of student learning;
- District and school early intervention strategies;
- Strong leadership and sense of team is evident throughout the district at all levels – parents, teachers, support staff, administrators, district staff, and students;
- Joint and cooperative management of professional development.

Promising Practices

The Team observed a number of promising practices that may be instructive or useful to other districts in improving student achievement. They include:

- District "grade group" meetings;
- Ladybugs, Lyrics and Laughter – (Intervention Umbrella);
- LD Self Advocacy Program – (The Mentors);
- Summer Read and Rec;
- Building leadership capacity.

Recommendations

The Review Team offers the following recommendations to the District:

- Continue to support structures at the district level related to improving student achievement;
- Actively pursue the strategy related to the development of a tracking system for Aboriginal students and students at risk of not graduating;
- Analyze the factors affecting school completion rates so that specific strategies and interventions can be developed;
- Revise the district numeracy goal to include a wider grade range;
- Review sources of data to ensure validity and reliability;
- Assist schools to improve and refine School Improvement Plans so that these become clear and comprehensive planning documents;
- Continue to expand the use of B.C. Performance Standards.